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Well, well, by the time you read this it will be spring - or so I hope, and the snow will have retreated to the areas where it is meant to be: high up on the mountains and on postcards. It was spectacular though and, depending on your circumstances, reason for great excitement, or a real problem. I hope the cows have recovered from the white shock and from their three days of hay only, and the calves can venture out into the real world now, which is meant to be green, not white.

Local Swiss friends told me they showed their (adult) daughter how to build a snowman; where they live there had never been enough snow before to introduce her into the intricate art of snowman-building. I'm so relieved this gap in their daughter's education has now been filled.

I'm not adventurous. I stayed indoors, where I had a fire going. It was much quieter on the road past my house than usual, but it was quite noisy otherwise: The wind howled round my chimney, and sleet pounded my skylight, and at high tide sea spray washed over my windows. I went through a lot of firewood, but it was so nice to be warm!

When the worst was over, a neighbour spotted a mollymawk on the beach. It was a beautiful, majestic bird. It was clearly exhausted and didn't fight when it was picked up. First we thought we could place it in a more sheltered spot on the beach where it might recover, but then we decided this wouldn't do; even the most sheltered spot was cold and buffeted by gales. So we bedded the bird into a box and delivered it to an ornithologist who had offered to look after it. But it was too far gone, and even the best of care couldn't prevent the death of our albatross. The ornithologist informed me that it was a young Salvin's Albatross, probably from the Bounty Islands, some 700 km east of Stewart Island, in the middle of nowhere, or rather in the middle of the South Pacific. Like all albatrosses,

it could soar effortlessly through the sky. But somehow it was blown off course and suddenly found itself over land and had to struggle to find water again. It made it, and landed on the beach of Wellington Harbour, to die in the care of an ornithologist, a volunteer who devoted a great deal of his spare time to seabirds. Albatrosses can live up to 60 years and more. Our albatross might end up in Te Papa, because it was such a perfect bird and only died of exhaustion. I must say, I find it highly offensive. No wonder I haven't become a scientist. I'm still sad we couldn't get it back into the air.

Trudi

The Bath Tub Test

During a visit to my doctor, I asked him, "How do you determine whether an older person should be put in an old age home?"

"Well," he said, "we fill up a bathtub, then we offer a teaspoon, a teacup and a bucket to the person to empty the bathtub."

"Oh, I understand," I said. "A normal person would use the bucket because it is bigger than the spoon or the teacup."

"No" he said. "A normal person would pull the plug. Do you want a bed near the window?"

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